



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY,
7TH SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Ridgewell - Chair
Councillor M. Adams - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

D. Cushing, C. Elsbury, R. W. Gough, L. Harding, Ms P. Leonard, B. Owen, Mrs M. E. Sargent, W. Williams and B. Zaplatynski.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor. L. Phipps (Housing) and Councillor A. Whitcombe (Sustainability, Planning and Fleet).

Together with:

M. S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), F. Wilkins (Housing Services Manager), S. Isaacs (Rents Manager), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Coordination Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairperson reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click here to view.](#)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, A. G. Higgs, G. Kirby, Mrs G. D. Oliver and Mrs D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D. Cushing declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 in relation to recycling. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment advised Members that the remit of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee is only in relation to the Regeneration and Planning element of the Directorate Performance Assessment Six Month Update 2020 report.

3. MINUTES – 20TH JULY 2021

In response to a Members query the Scrutiny Officer agreed to recirculate previous responses in relation to the Dog Control PSPO Proposals report and security of void properties.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20th July 2021 (minute nos. 1 - 7) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period September 2021 to March 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20th July 2021. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Reference was made to the Cabinet Forward Work Programme and clarification was sought as to how the Managing Service Risk at Alert Level Zero report will be monitored. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment advised the Scrutiny Committee that the report will be considered by Cabinet and there will also be further update reports to Cabinet in terms of monitoring. Members were further advised that the general Corporate Risk Register and the Covid Risk Register are both regularly reviewed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT). The Covid Risk register is reviewed on a monthly basis and the Managing Service Risk at Alert Level Zero report will form part of that monitoring by CMT. It was highlighted that the Risk Register is a live document and available for Members to view.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SIX MONTH UPDATE 2020

The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment introduced the report to present the Scrutiny Committee with a copy of the Economy and Environment Directorate Performance Assessment (DPA) which is part of the Council's new Performance Framework. Members were referred to the Directorate Performance Assessment at Appendix A and it was pointed out that the section on finance refers to the current year, however it should refer to the closure of the last financial year. Members were advised that a revised report will be sent out subsequent to the meeting.

Clarification and further information were sought in relation to the number of visitors to Cwmcarn Forest Drive. The Regeneration Services Manager provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the progress made in relation to Cwmcarn Forest Drive. Members were informed that Cwmcarn Forest Drive is now open and in collaboration with Natural Resources Wales over £1m has been spent in terms of resurfacing works and creating points of interest along the drive. It was highlighted that there are aspirations to turn it into a regional tourist attraction and funding has been secured from the regeneration board budget to appoint consultants to develop a masterplan.

A Member raised a query in relation to the complaints process and highlighted the number of complaints for the Community and Leisure Service. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment provided an overview of the complaints received and an explanation of how and when they are dealt with. Members were informed that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales has introduced a new regime where service requests are now classified as complaints, so there will be changes in terms of how complaints are captured and reported on.

The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment highlighted the work undertaken in terms of Regeneration and Planning and placed on record his thanks to the staff who have worked incredibly hard through the pandemic. In particular he highlighted the change to remote Planning Committee meetings and the business as usual approach by the Planning Service despite there being a 50% increase in planning applications. The Director also highlighted the excellent work that had been undertaken by the regeneration staff in terms of supporting businesses throughout the pandemic and working closely with staff in corporate finance to quickly process Welsh Government Covid grants to businesses. Members of the committee also expressed their thanks and asked that they be passed onto the staff concerned.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Economy and Environment Directorate Performance Assessment and discussed, challenged and scrutinised the information contained within.

7. CAERPHILLY HOMES DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT YEAR END REPORT 2020/21

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report to present the Scrutiny Committee with the year-end Caerphilly Homes Directorate Performance Assessment (DPA) which is part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. Members were informed that the DPA is the Directorate's self-assessment and forms part of the Council's overall self-assessment activity and provides information and analysis for the year ending 2020/21. Members were invited to discuss, challenge, and scrutinise the range of information in the DPA. The summary of conclusions as to the top 3 top achievements and 3 areas identified

as areas to improve upon or where there is further learning to be explored were highlighted.

It was highlighted that the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had a significant impact on services this year with core services being considerably reduced and staff redeployed to support wider Corporate community initiatives, such as the Buddy Scheme. Performance has been impacted as a consequence but essential services have continued to be provided as well as assistance to the most vulnerable groups of clients. The Cabinet Member for Housing placed on record her thanks to all housing staff for their efforts during the Covid pandemic.

The Housing Services Manager provided the Scrutiny Committee with background information to the Caerphilly Homes Directorate Performance Assessment and highlighted the achievements and progress made. It was highlighted that Tenancy Support is one of the areas that has benefited from agile working and home working, as it has increased the capacity to support tenants.

During the course of debate concerns were raised regarding access to Housing Officers. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that there are no dates, at present, for staff to return to the Neighbourhood Housing Offices. Members were informed that some of the phone lines have been changed to increase access to staff and it was highlighted that all Housing Officers have direct lines and also receive enquires through the office. Members were advised to contact the Housing Services Manager if they are experiencing any difficulties regarding access to the Housing Officers, so enquires can be made to ascertain whether it is an IT issue or if further changes need to be made. It was noted that there have been some concerns as to who to contact in relation to the different areas. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that a spreadsheet is currently being produced which will provide all Members with a range of information in relation to the Housing Officers and areas of service. In response to a Members request, it was agreed that a similar document can be made available on-line for members of the public. Following on from previous discussions it was also agreed that a structure of the Housing department would be provided for Members.

During the course of discussion, the Housing Services Manager updated the Scrutiny Committee on the current position of the Neighbourhood Housing Offices and provided Members with information on initiating Community Surgeries. A Member sought further information on Community Surgeries and was advised that as they develop information will be available and publicised. The Officer explained that Members can attend with tenants to provide support or advocacy. Clarification was sought in relation to the increase in tenancy support. The Rents Manager provided Members with a detailed response and gave an overview of the process and different ways of working.

Reference was made to the average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that performance has been significantly impacted during this financial year as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the approach to delivering Disabled Facilities Grants was explained to Members. During the course of discussion, the importance of customer satisfaction was highlighted and the Housing Services Manager informed Members that the number of days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant is not a reflection on the service provided. Members were also informed that the performance indicator is currently being reviewed.

The Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Caerphilly Homes Directorate Performance Assessment and discussed, challenged and scrutinised the information contained within.

8. WELSH GOVERNMENT PROSPECTUS AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PDP)

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report to seek the views of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee prior to the submission of the 2021/22 Programme Development Plan (PDP) and the Local Housing Market Assessment Prospectus to Welsh Government and to Cabinet on 15th September 2021. The report updated Members on the changes that have been made to the way in which the Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant is coordinated and allocated amongst partner housing associations and Caerphilly Homes. It was highlighted that to coincide with this change, Welsh Government have also introduced a series of new requirements including the introduction of a new grant regime and viability model which calculates the proportion of grant allowable on each scheme (known as the Standard Viability Model (SVM); a new Programme Development Plan (PDP) format and a requirement for a Local Housing Market Assessment (LMHA) Prospectus which sets out the housing need and priorities in each local authority area based on the LHMA. The Strategic Coordination Manager provided the Scrutiny Committee with a detailed summary of the report.

A query was raised regarding the Affordable Housing Programme monitoring and governance arrangements, in relation to Scrutiny involvement. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager made reference to detail in the appendices and advised Members that a report will be brought to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in early 2022 and further reports would be taken through the scrutiny process periodically.

Clarification was sought on housing need and demand and a Member enquired as to how the assessment showed a nil requirement overall for 2 and 3 bed general needs accommodation. It was outlined to Members of the Committee how this was not the case within his ward as there was a pressing need for 3-bedroom accommodation. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager highlighted how this section of the draft report represented the whole of the county borough which showed a predominant need for 1-person accommodation. It was also outlined Members how, in the future, it was the intention to develop diverse and inclusive housing provision based on evidence and need.

A Member raised concerns regarding the new zoning arrangements and a question was raised as to how this would impact on local delivery requirements. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager stressed the importance of working with new providers to gain an understanding of their development strategies in order to influence decisions on issues such as providing zero-carbon and accessible homes. A further question was raised regarding funding and whether or not the Council would eventually be competing with other housing providers for grant funding. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager outlined the current allocation from the Welsh Government and highlighted that in future there would be competition with housing associations, however there would still be an element of partnership working. Reference was made to appendix 3 of the report and the Officer responded to a number of queries raised in relation to two sites listed under summary of developments funded by the PDP.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report, PDP and draft LHMA Prospectus. The points raised by Members of the Scrutiny Committee will be incorporated into the report for presentation to Cabinet on 15th September 2021.

The meeting closed at 7.16 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR